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AUTHOR Farrell, Edwin
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ABSTRACT

The urban high school dropout phenomenon may result from the inability of at-risk students to integrate competing social identities, or "selves." Using Erik Erikson's theory of adolescent personality development as a framework, this study analyzes information gathered from interviews with 73 New York City high school students by peer interviewers. Student attitudes toward the following areas of personal development are analyzed: (1) career; (2) sex; (3) peer relationships; (4) family relationships; (5) parenthood; (6) school; (7) boredom; and (8) drugs. The following findings are discussed: (1) while the formation of an occupational identity is the student's most important developmental task, most adolescents are more concerned with their sexual identities; (2) peers seem to have more immediate impact on the student's life than family; (3) while parenthood may become the major force in the lives of some adolescent mothers, others are completely unaffected by it; (4) career, sex, peer and family relationships, and motherhood are greater concerns than school; (5) boredom, the result of inadequate adjustment to school, appears to be the first in a series of steps to dropping out; (6) drugs are the most destructive force in students' lives; and (7) conflicts in the meaning of school as between teachers and students must be overcome in formulating solutions to the dropout problem. A vocational education program could provide the environment that at-risk students need to focus and integrate their conflicting selves. A list of 43 references is appended. (FMW)

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